

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY

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Dr. Charlene M. Dukes, President
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building
Maryland State Board of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Via Hand Delivery

Dear Dr. Dukes:

On behalf of the Board of Education of Frederick County and Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), I would like to communicate our concerns regarding the State Board's transition plan from the current High School Assessments to the PARCC High School Assessments, which was adopted at your February 25, 2014, meeting.

The Board of Education of Frederick County and FCPS share the goals of Maryland's reform efforts. Our district has worked diligently to align our materials and curriculum to the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards. We have positioned resources to support the necessary training and professional development, as well as enhanced our teacher and principal evaluation systems to improve instructional practice and student performance. We are committed to the goals of adhering to a common and consistent set of high-quality and rigorous standards, to the continued professional development of our teachers and administrators, and to our ultimate accountability for student performance and growth.

However, we urge that the State Board give serious consideration and discussion to two issues. First, the need to extend the slow and mindful approach in evaluating and implementing the new assessment data to determine graduation requirements and the college and/or career readiness of Maryland students, just as you are leading the careful development in the use of the data as it relates to personnel decisions. Second, that definitive guidance be given no later than August 1, 2014, as to the consequences that PARCC assessments will have upon the graduation eligibility and the determination of college/career readiness of students who sit for them in the spring of 2015.

Determination of Student Graduation Eligibility and College/Career Readiness

Our Board commends the State Board in moving forward to request the waiver to delay, by an additional year, the use of PARCC testing results to inform personnel decisions. We respectfully request that the same consideration is given to decisions affecting students' status and their eligibility for graduation. We look to the model that the State Board and the Maryland State Department of Education have taken in

the past with the cautious and deliberate approach to the development of the current high-stakes exams, the HSAs.

Timely and Definitive Guidance

Separate from the development of pass/fail PARCC assessment scores and career/college readiness scores, it is imperative that we are able to provide guidance as soon as possible to parents and students as they are making critical decisions now in terms of their coursework for the next school year. It is our understanding that PARCC will determine performance levels and cut scores over the summer of 2015, and those determinations will be available to schools and students in the fall of 2015, at the earliest. This timeframe comes too late for current eighth and ninth graders, who will sit for these assessments during the 2014/15 school year. By the time these scores and their implications are fully understood, it is possible that these students will be halfway through the first semester courses of the following school year, when they are sophomores and juniors. It creates a severe limitation to students and families in terms of effective planning of coursework, a challenge to counselors, administrators, and teachers in terms of providing effective and timely guidance to students, and creates a communications challenge for school districts to make sure students, families and staff have adequate, timely, and clear information on which to base decisions and plans of action. We urge that the State Board designate that the act of sitting for the assessments be used to fulfill graduation requirements until at least 2016/17, to align with the timeframe put forward regarding their use in personnel decisions.

We appreciate the opportunity the State Board has made available for public comment. Our ability to effectively communicate our concerns and share our input with you is critical to our capacity to meet our students' needs. With that in mind, we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with other districts and your Board during this period of transition towards our shared goals of positioning our students for success in college or career.

Respectfully,



Joy Schaefer
President

- c: Dr. Lillian M. Lowery, State Superintendent of Schools
Members, Maryland State Board of Education
Dr. Theresa Alban, Superintendent, Frederick County Public Schools
Members, Board of Education of Frederick County